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A bilingual elementary school for Spanish-speaking childrer in Chicago, Lafayette Center, is described in this paper. The primary concern of the Center has been parent involvement, with home visits to the parents by school community representatives before and after enrollment and an Open House in December. This function was well attended by community leaders and other officials, but not particularly by parents, partly, it was felt, because the parents are happy with the Program and do not feel the need to come to the school, and partly because of the expensive public transportation in Chicago. The Puerto Rican community, in which the Center is located, is enthusiastic about the Program. The Mexican community, while approving the Program, resents that a second center was not opened in their community. Both resent the fact that the Program is limited to the poor; all the children who need it are not included. The non-Spanish-speaking community of European background is, to varying degrees, "indifferent, resentful, or hostile," because bilingual centers had not been provided for their parents or grandparents, who were under pressure to acculturate. There must be, the author stresses, a total community acceptance of a new approach to the education of our Spanish-speaking students and a recognition of their community rights concerning their children's education. (AMM)

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COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN THE BI-LINGUAL CENTER

Before I begin the discussion of community involvement in the bi-lingual center I would like to describe very briefly the Lafayette Center. Unlike the bi-lingual centers like that of Dade County, Florida, who enroll both Spanish-speaking and non-Spanish-speaking children, the Lafayette Center enrolls ONLY Spanish-speaking children. Our objectives are to teach the children the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing English fluently, to maintain and develop their skills in the academic subjects so that when they enter high school they will be truly bi-lingual and be able to continue their academic career in English. And, of course, we are committed to maintaining and developing their ability to speak, read, and write Spanish. To these ends, the children engage in TESL activities all morning and then study their academic subjects in Spanish in the afternoon.

The children in the Center come from seven or eight different schools, only two of which are within walking distance of their homes. While most of the children are Puerto Rican, some of them are Mexican, we have one Cuban child and one from Santo Domingo. There are advantages and disadvantages in having a group like this rather than limiting it to the Puerto Rican children. It is not in the scope of this talk to discuss the educational and psychological advantages and disadvantages. In terms of community involvement, however, the disadvantage lies in the fact that simply because they share a common language it does not necessarily follow that people will share like concerns--the advantage being that all of the Spanish-speaking found themselves in agreement that the bi-lingual center was a good thing.

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Now what do we mean by community involvement in the bi-lingual center? We mean the participation of the parents of the children in the center, the Puerto Rican community, the Mexican community, the Puerto Rican and Mexican leaders, the Spanish press and the non-Spanish speaking community.

Primarily parent involvement has been our concern. When the principals and teachers of the sending schools had chosen the candidates for the Center, the school community representative of each school called upon the parents to explain the program and to inquire if they wished their children to participate. This unhurried home visit enabled the parents to ask questions not only concerning the learning program, but also questions concerning the distance, who were the teachers, how much would it cost, etc. etc. Only a few of the parents declined the invitation because of the distance involved. And only one child withdrew because of "homesickness." When the children had enrolled the bi-lingual S.C.R. called on each family to get the reaction of the parents and to inquire if there were any questions she could answer. One parent expressed anxiety that there was too much Spanish being taught--she was surprised to learn that the whole morning was devoted to English. Somehow her child, in telling of the school day, had apparently not considered it important to tell her that. The S.C.R. also offered her services to assist the families and urged the parents to come in to the school at any time. She was of great assistance in showing some parents how to obtain health services, she accompanied them to agencies, and she assisted one mother to get a job. In December, the Center had an Open House to which everyone was invited. It was very well attended by the community leaders, by teachers, by police officials, churchmen, nuns, welfare workers but not particularly by parents.

Occasionally a parent will come in without invitation to see how her child is doing and there have been conferences with a few of the parents. They have obviously enjoyed the visit - they are always invited to have a cup of coffee and a cake or cookie, but to say that we have parent involvement in the sense that they come to school is simply not true. Yet we know that they are happy with the program, that they are pleased that their children are being given this opportunity. It is precisely for this reason --their satisfaction with the program--that they do not feel the need to come to the school.

But there is another, more practical reason, why they do not come. Public transportation in Chicago is very expensive. The C.T.A. fare one way is 40 cents and if a transfer is required it is 45 cents. The children eligible for the program must be children on welfare, A.D.C., or below the maximum limit on income set by the Federal government. It is hardly reasonable to expect them to spend almost a dollar a day on carfare in order to confer with teachers. We had hoped to organize a mother's club, to set up a class in English for them - this has been done in some of the schools in our area and very successfully - but the parents in those schools can walk and besides they are meeting with their neighbors. So our involvement with the parents is through the S.C.R. communications by letters and bulletins and the Spanish report cards we have developed.

The Puerto Rican community is very enthusiastic about the program. Many came to the Open House and expressed their gratification and their hope that the program would be expanded. The Mexican community and their leaders have also expressed approval, but they do resent the fact that the center is in a predominantly Puerto Rican

area and that a second center was not opened in the predominantly Mexican community. Both groups resent that the program is limited to the poor and that ALL the children who need the program are not included. There is a stronger feeling in the Mexican community that our country should be bi-lingual--that Spanish should be the second language of the non-Spanish speaking population. This is, of course, unrealistic. While the rise of ethnicity may be a subject for debate, I do not think that it is debatable that there is no prospect that Spanish will become the second language of the whole United States. But be that as it may, the Mexican community is involved in the Center to the extent that they are insistent in their demand for such education, and I suspect that the Mexican-American from the southwest is more insistent than the Mexican from Mexico.

The involvement of the non-Spanish speaking community is another matter. Those people who do not live in touch with the Spanish-speaking people are at the best indifferent, and, of course, we do not know how aware those communities are to the program. The people who live in the area are to varying degrees indifferent, resentful, or hostile. There is the resentment from those of European background who point out that there were no bi-lingual centers for their parents or grandparents - that the public schools did not bother with them - that to maintain their language they had to go to ethnic private schools - that they did not have special history courses in the country of their background. In short, in their way they are expressing their faith in the melting pot concept. I suspect that there are many teachers and administrators who agree with them in principle. It was, after all, in intent a beautiful American dream---

in practice, it was a wounding experience for those who had to accept the judgment that there was a cultural image to which they must aspire and that their partial acceptance - never a full one - depended upon the degree to which they melted into the pot and re-formed into a facsimile of the image.

What I am trying to say is that community involvement with the bi-lingual center means a total community acceptance of a new approach to the education of our Spanish-speaking students, and a recognition that the Spanish-speaking community has as much the right to advise and consent to curriculum revision, objectives, content, methods and means for their children as every society has had since the school first appeared in the social order. It is hardly a new idea that we gear education to the needs of the pupils. To recognize that adjusting the curriculum is not simply a matter of adjusting to the three traditional layers of boys and girls - the bright, average, and slow nor the equal traditional layers or rich, middle class, and poor--should not be all that difficult for us nor for the communities.